12

Sociétés

(Dan)

From Mr. Carlisle's letter to you as well as from divers other accounts it appears that the English have but an imperfect knowledge of what the Danish government, as well as different Societies have done in order to promote the study of northern (a) history and to search for and preserve its sources. I shall therefore endeavour to explain what seems to be often confounded.

The oldest society in Denmark, called the <u>Danish Society</u> (   ) whose object it was to throw light on the history and language of the northern countries was founded in the year 1744 by the celebrated <u>Lange-beck</u>. the chief view of this society con-sisted in publishing important docu-ments and saving from oblivion Ma-nuscripts & even printed accounts & papers, which were but seldom to be met with and which serve to illustrate

(a) Northen (the north) in the sense it is used in the original comprises Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Sueden, sometimes but seldom England and the North of Germany, particularly when the Scandinavian nation were in these countries.



Northern history and to characterize the manners and institutions of past ages.

This society published 6 volumes 4° called the Danish Magazine

; though sometimes descriptions of antiquities or medals were inserted in this magazine, yet this was but seldom the case, and may be regarded as an exception from the general rule, on the other hand the Society was of great utility in collecting considerable archives and some antiquities. —

At a later period a genealogical and heraldic Society was founded, the object of which was to throw light on the history of the northern nobility, genealogy and heraldry. This society founded an Archiv and published a dictionary of the Danish nobility, from the earliest times to the present. In 1810 this society was united with the former, assuming the name of "Royal Danish Society for National History & Language" (. .

it is at this moment in activity and has published the above mentioned Dictionary of Nobility (

in two volumes "Magazine of the history of the Nobility" (

1 volume

4° and a continuation of the old Danish Magazine

in 5 volumes 4° called New Danish

Magazine

They have so far Deviated from the original Plan that Descriptions of monuments and antiquities are not received in addision to it

Magazine

They have so far Deviated from the original Plan that Descriptions of monuments and antiquities are not received in addition to the archive Documents; they direct their attention chiefly to such papers as are illustrative of the alterations wich the language has undergone; they have among other things inserted in their works a fragment of the first Danish translation of the Bible a treatise on the first attempts that were made to compose dictionaries of the Danish language

The antiquities of which the Society was possessed have been transferred to the Royal Museum of Northern antiquities, the medals and coins to the Royal Cabinet of Medals; but their archives are greatly increased, & being the only place in Denmark, where numerous & authentic records of the nobility are kept, this society must, upon many occasions, furnish such information as is probably obtained from the Herald Office in England, or from the Riddar, huus (: house of Knights.) in Sweden; Though it gives no legal decisions, which power solely belong to the courts of justice, yet as its Declarations and affirmations are considered of great weight, a great regard is necessarily paid to them.

The "legacy of Arne Magnaeus" ( )
( ) is another institution still older than this united society, and which has been very useful and is in activity at the present moment. Arne Magnaeus was Professor of northern antiquities in the university of Copenhagen and afterwards librairian of the university; he passed a great part of his life in professional travels in Iceland his native country & in Norway; On these travels he collected an inestimable quantity of manuscripts, consisting not only of Sagas, letters and deeds, but of some of the most scarce codices, of histories, annals and laws. Notwithstanding more than half of this collection was destroyed by fire two years previous to the death of Magnaeus, I believe we may affirm that the Icelandic and old northern manuscripts which were saved, form a collection as considerable as any that might be made, if all the manuscripts of this discription found in other librairies were put together.

Arne Magnaeus died in the year 1730 & bequeathed his manuscripts to the library of the university of Copenhagen, & his fortune which was not

inconsiderable; to a perpetual legacy for the use of this collection

Two Students, natives of Iceland, are always paid out of the interest of this Capital, to practise reading and copying manuscripts of which the most important and most correct ~~are~~ are published under the superintendence of the directors of this legacy, appointed by the King. Thus by means of this legacy interesting Sagas and other works have been published as for instance: the "Landnama Book" (& the poetical Edda" ( ) of which the 3d and last volume has been finished this year. — Graa = Gaasen (the grey goose a collection of ancient Icelandic laws:); a remarkable and important work is now in the press.

In the year 1807, the government resolved, at the proposal of some patriots, to adopt measures in order to preserve the antiquities and monuments that had escaped destruction, & which were daily decaying; for this end the King appointed a perpetual comittee to superintend the preservation ~~of~~ of the antiquities & to endeavour to explain what was obscure. This comittee received the name of

"Royal Commission for the preservation of antiquities."

It is a great mistake therefore to consider this committee as a Society; the members are appointed by the King, never exceeding eight in number, and on their will only it depends to elect corresponding members.

Though most things are performed voluntarily, and by persons who take interest in antiquities, yet in order to avoid disputes, the executive power is made over to the court of justice whenever any difficulties occur. This committee also differs from a Society in having the power to command in many instances, where a Society is obliged to solicit.

It has been adopted as a maxim that those monuments and antiquities, which are of greatest value in respect to the place & circumstances in which they are found, are to remain there but monuments that have been once removed or smaller articles that might be easely lost or mislaid, are generally placed in the public collections.

According to the ancient

Danish laws, all ~~pr[illegible]~~ (precious) metals found in the earth (which are called Dannefæ) belong to the King; this right still exists, but it has received an important alteration and addition by an ordinance issued by Frederic the 5th, in consequence of which every person who finds such things in the earth is bound to deliver them up, & furnish what illustrations he is able; but at the same time the finder is to receive out of the King's privy purse the full value of the metals found, which has always been paid. It must be observed that the reward is paid, not to the proprietor of the ground in which such things are found, but to the finder or finders, among whom are generally reckoned those who are present when the things are dug out of the ground. The committee has endeavoured to establish a more just proportion than that which formerly consisted, with regard to the preservation and reward paid for such articles as are <u>not</u> of precious metals (<u>gold & silver</u>), but are nevertheless of a higher value and interest to antiquarians than gold and silver. They likewise encourage people in general to give

to the collection which they have established whatever other articles of this description they may have in their possession.

Experience has shown us that nothing is attended with greater success than expressions of gratitude to those who contribute to the progress & success of this establishment, and the maintenance of a correspondence with persons in different parts of the Kingdom who take interest in & are acquainted with antiquities, such persons act in some manner as agents for the committee.

Another expedient which has proved useful, is to render the collections as public as possible; for this purpose the cabinet is open on certain days to every person, who wishes to see the collections; in this manner a general interest has been excited for this establishment and much information has been received from casual visitors with regard to many articles of antiquity, which would not otherwise have been obtained, for though most persons & chiefly those of the

middle classes are often scrupulous, nay even reluctant in communicating to the committee any accounts or information in writing, especially with regard to things which are not their property, yet they are always willing to talk about them, and thus the explainations which they have given verbally have often led to useful discoveries.

A third expedient has been used which has often been of great efficacy; this consists in inserting advertisements in the almanacks in use among the peasantry; As a specimen I annex a calendar for the year 1829.—

By these means the committy has succeded, during a space of 16 years, to make a collections, which, though it may still be considered as a commencement, has nevertheless exceeded their expectations & is dayly encreasing.—

This collection is called "The Royal museum of Northern antiquities (

The following rules have been

established by the committee viz.
1) Nothing is admitted into the main collection but what has been found or used in the North or what has some relation to it.—
2) Antiquities & monuments which have already been removed are what they chiefly endeavour to obtain, the medals have been delivered to the royal cabinet; the manuscripts which the committee receive are distributed in the following manner, important records are delivered to the Royal archives, others to ~~the~~ the archives of the above mentioned Royal Danish Society & the codices to the libraries.
3) To every article which the committee receives a number is fixed, which, to prevent its being confounded with the number of the class & division to which it belongs, is written in different cipher, this number refers to a register in which an account of every article is inserted, by this means the description of any article may instantly be found; as for instance what has been found with it, the circumstances of its discovery & the name of the donor if it is a gift

This list is printed in the "Antiquarian Annals. 18
of the list the first number was published in 1817. The last number which was published is the MDCCXXX but one number sometimes contains more than one article.

The antiquities are divided into the following divisions and Subdivisions: viz:

A. Those that derive their origin from, or belong to the heathen ages of the North (As the Christian religion was generally established in the North about the year 1000, what is found in this division is considered to be older than that era, but belonging of course to different periods:)

The present subdivisions consist of:

a. Arms, implements & symbols of stone, which probably belong to the remotest times, they consist of about 500 different articles.

b. Sepulchral urns, which are divided into ancient & later.

To the urns is added a collection of several parts of Skeletons, bones, coal &c partly found in the urns and partly in the barrows near the urns.

c. Sacral (vessels used in sacrifice, incense bols, amulets)

d. Arms of metal, to these are added trappings of the warhorse

e. Ornaments, of Metal, glass, amber &c

f. Tools & household implements of metal (not of stone)

g. Different articles, the use of which are unknown & uncertain. –

The committee has endeavoured to establish a chronological order in the subdivisions, and it is probable that this head division may be subdivided into three different periods, when the collection shall be more complete, of which the two last will then receive most of the foregoing subdivisions.

B. Runic monuments. To these belong only the inscriptions, properly speaking where the monuments have been erected on purpose to engrave the inscriptions on them, but not where the inscription is only an addition which has been put upon monuments originally destined for other purposes, so that to these belong tomb stones & other runic stones, which not are found near the graves or other places where they were originally placed; Inscriptions cut in wood or engraven in metals in this oldest northern character. Censers, baptismal basins, calendars &c though the inscriptions on them be engraved in runic characters do not belong to this division as the inscription is only a suplement. –

C. Articles relating to the catholic worship in the North

a. Altars.

b. Images of saints & relics

c. Different vessels, such as pyxes, chalices baptismal basins &c

d. Altar cloths, garments of the priests etc

e. Divers articles

and the following additional articles

19

f. painting on glass. g) Missals & indulgences

h. Seals

i. Calendars & articles relating to the Christian computation of time.

D. Household furniture, tools and ornaments of the Christian middle ages

a. Remmants of building materials

b. Tools

c. Household furniture among which is a choice collection of drinking-horns and drinking vessels

d. Ornaments

e. Sundries

E. Arms and armour from the chivalrous times and a later period
To these are added things belonging to horsemanship & hunting.

F. 3 Additional divisions belonging to the collection

a. Curiosities from later times such as articles that belonged to remarkable persons and such as refer to ancient manners & institutions

b. Antiquities from neighbouring countries or such as serve to illustrate what is found in the North, as for instance sepulchral urns from England & the North of Germany, weapons of Stone which shew the manner in which the uncivilized nations used to fix stones to wood etc

c. A collection of drawings & engravings of Monuments & antiquities especially of those found in the North.
From the archives & librairies, much has been obtained of this description

which was formerly kept in them, the monuments are arranged according to the places in which they have been found; with regard to the antiquities a chronological order has been observed.

This is an ample collection, the Drawings alone are about 1,500 in number.

The committee has published 6 volumes each in two parts entitled "Annals of antiquities" — the last printed in 1827. They contain treatises illustrative of antiquities, descriptions of monuments & a list of articles which have been delivered to the Museum. As the "New Danish Magazine ( )" is appropriated to the explanation of ancient writings and documents, so the object of those annals is to give an account of antiques and of Monuments properly speaking.

In the year 1821 the King ordered that the earlier Royal Collection should be arranged, and catalogues made of the articles it contained; this is the cabinet with which Mr Carlisle is acquainted under the name of "Museum regium". This, in course of time, became an ample, but confused collection of pictures, curiosities, antiquities, jewels, natural curiosities and different articles relating to forein nations (ethnographica)

As persons who possessed knowledge of all the different branches, were not to be found, and as the labour would take much time the King appointed 6 different committies to arrange and describe these articles.

after a labour of six years a knowledge was obtained of the different things of which the collection was composed and they were carefully arranged and classed; The collection was also removed to a more convenient place.

When the natural curiosities had been separated from this collection, the curiosities of art and antiquities which form the largest and most valuable part, obtained the name of <u>Royal Museum</u> (   )

A committee was appointed to arrange and make catalogues of the antiquities of the north and the curiosities from the Middle age which it contained; This committee was composed of the Secretary and a member of comittee for the preservation of antiquities, they followed the principles which had been adopted for the arrangement of the <u>Museum of Northern antiquities</u>,

this will in a great measure facilitate the uniting of these two collections, which will be the case as soon as circumstances may permit, and a proper place be obtained

As the old collection consisted chiefly of articles of gold and silver which were found and delivered to it, it is neither so ample nor so systematically arranged as the <u>museum of Northern antiquities</u>, it contains however a number of rare and valuable articles, particularly ornaments and relics. After having been deprived of everything which

did not properly belong to it, this collection consisted of
242 articles from the heathen time most of which are very curious. –
135 d^o relating to the catholic worship
168 Numbers consisting of household furniture and ornaments of the Christian middle ages. –
216 .. armour, arms and different things relating the Chivalry. –

A few years ago a society was established in Copenhagen, the object of which is to publish and explain writings and papers of northern antiquity, as well as to publish treatises illustrative of the ancient history and ~~an~~ antiquities of the North. It is in great activity and has first directed its attention to the Icelandic Sagas relating historical occurences, which have happened out of Iceland. As the works published by the Executors of the will of Arne Magnaeus contain only the original texts with latin translations this society has endeavoured to render these more public, and to get them printed more expeditiously by publishing the original text with Danish and Latin translations, each in separate volumes, which latter may consequently be obtained either separately or in connection with the original Icelandic

Such manuscripts as have not been printed before, and such as are esteemed the most interesting are first published; and these are printed even though the translations should not be finished when the texts are ready for publication.—

In the course of three years besides the treatises they have published

4 volumes	of Icelandic original text	
3 "	" Danish translations	
1 "	" Latin translations (of which more are in the press)	
8 volumes.		

This society which is very numerous has received several proofs of the kings approbation with regard to their object and activity; it is called Royal Society for ancient northern Manuscripts (Kongelige nordiske Oldskrifts Selskab) Large and important historical works have been published and continued at the king's expense; in this manner the Professors Thorlacius & Werlauf finished in 1826 the 6th and last volume of the large folio edition of the sagas of Norwegian kings by Snorre Sturleson; In like manner the 8th volume of Scriptores rerum danicorum is now in the press

The last volume of the history of Denmark by the late celebrated Suhm has this year been published by his scholar Professor Nyerup.

This volume (the 14th) closes this copious work, which begins with the first ages and is continued till the year 1400.

The royal Danish Society of Sciences (Kongelige Danske Videnskabers Selskab) is an institution supported by government, and which must not be confounded with the abovementioned societies.

It has published special charts of the Danish provinces and a large Dictionary of the Danish language which is however not yet finished, it direct its attention to every branch of the Sciences. The writings of this society have late been published in two separate series unconnected with each other of which the one contains essays on historical & philosophical subjects, & the other on physical & mathematical ones.

Original treatises on egyptian & the classic antiquities which are not of great length are commonly published in the former of these, or in Miscellanea Hafniensia in

this manner particular works have been assigned for the insertion of the different historical & antiquarian researches

The Scandinavian Literary Society (Det Scandinaviske Litteratur Selskab) is an institution to which foreigners in general ascribe an object different from its real one; its object is to unite the literature of the three northern kingdoms, & to contribute their assistance to the promotion of litterature in general. The principal seat of this society being in Copenhagen, this city has in some measure got the superiority; & the literary contributions from Sweden & Norway are fewer in proportion. —

Sciences connected with history have not been excluded from their writings, on the contrary many good and excellent essays historical, numismatic & antiquarian are to be met with in these, which already comprise 24 volumes, but besides contain treatises and essays on various subjects, such as philosophy, belles-lettres, mathematics, politics as well as letters on different subjects &c

from this account, as it contains a view of all the different institutions the London Antiquarian Society will, I hope, obtain the desired information, if any further illustrations however should be found necessary I shall always be ready to furnish such as it lies in my power to give.

Copenhagen June the 20th 1828

Your most obed.t Serv.
(Signed) Thomsen

Translated from the Danish.